

CHAPTER 3

APRIL 13, 2011

The sound of the bell chimes woke Justin up. School was finally over, and despite the fact that he had been asleep the entire time, it felt good to be able to get out of there. He rubbed his eyes a bit and straightened out his back. Looking around the classroom, he noticed King Moron leaving the room in a hurry. And suddenly, Justin felt incredibly thankful for having fallen asleep, for two reasons; the first being that he wouldn't have to listen to another word coming out of his mouth about purity or whatever the hell it was he talked about. The second, and perhaps more important, he now knew King Moron had no idea when Justin was asleep, which meant he could do it ANY time.

"So you're getting used to this place?"

Justin turned around at the slightly familiar sound of Yosuke's voice. He had begun to strike up conversation with Yu. *When the hell did they get to be friends*, Justin wondered to himself. Something about Yu really just did not rub him the right way. *What is he always so happy about, and how the hell is he making friends as quickly as he is? It irritates the fuck out of me.* He wasn't quite sure why it annoyed him so much, but it did.

"I think so."

"Wow that was fast." He paused for a moment. Maybe he thought the sarcasm was going to go over Yu's head. Yu of course grinned that grin of his in response. Yosuke let out a bit of a sigh as he looked over towards the windows.

"There isn't much to do here compared to the big city, but there is that certain... something you can't get anywhere else..."

Wait, are those two potheads or something, he wondered to himself. *The way he stressed 'something' sounds way too familiar.* Back at his old school, a lot of the kids Justin went to class with were into marijuana. And you could always tell which ones because they were always, A, too stupid to not talk about it in public, and B, always trying to use everyday words to cover up the word "pot." And they did a terrible job at it too. You can't just put stress on the word "Swiss cheese," and be nonchalant at the same time. It would also explain what Yu was smiling about all the time.

"The air's clean, the food's great... Oh, you know the local delicacy?"

Crack, right?

"It's grilled steak, man! Like that's anything special, huh! You know, I know a place where you can get it cheap. Wanna come? You helped me this morning, so it's on me."

Well I guess that answered one of my questions. I'm just going to assume he rode his bike into a pole or something. As he finished collecting his thoughts, Justin was interrupted by the sound of Chie coming over from the front of the classroom.

"What about me, huh? No apologies? Uh, my Trial of the Dragon?"

"Urgh... You always come around when I'm talking about food..."

I knew he'd forget. Justin sighed, slightly in relief. He had decided to buy a copy of Trial of the Dragon that he had seen on his way home the night before. He was slightly irritated that Yosuke had decided to be a complete ass and forget all about the DVD, but at least he didn't waste his money. I mean, it wasn't like Justin had any intention on watching the movie.

"Well you DO owe her." Justin piped up casually, hoping not to sound as though he was eavesdropping.

"How about it, Yukiko? Don't you think he should treat us, too?"

Yukiko? Did he break something of hers too?

"I'll pass... I don't want to gain anymore weight. I need to help out at the Inn today anyway."

"Wow, Yukiko-san! You started training to take over the family business?"

Now that Yosuke brought it up, it did seem a bit strange that she was working at the Inn already.

"It's not like that! I'm just helping out when it gets busy. I should be going."

Yukiko casually walked out of the room. *Geeze, when my parents were around, I'd barely help them with the dishes, let alone an entire inn.*

"Well, how bout you Justin. Want to come with?"

Justin was surprised at the offer that Chie had extended to him. Partially because he had been a bit of an ass towards her yesterday, partially because it was Yosuke's money they were spending. Though he did owe her, so I guess it was okay.

"Huh? Oh uh... sure."

"Great then, it's settled. We should get going."

So this is Junes, Justin thought as he took a seat at one of the tables in the food court. It was very spacious, and more than a few stores caught his eye as he navigated his way to the food court. They even had an entire supermarket on the bottom floor. *What kind of mall does that? Not that I'm complaining, that just strikes me as a bit strange.*

"THIS is the cheap place you were talking about...? They don't have grilled steaks here."

Of course they don't, he sighed. *This really isn't helping my whole "Potheads replacing pot with random words," theory.*

"Yeah, well, once you hopped on the freeloader train, I had to change my plans."

"Well you DO owe her."

"I know! God rub it in some more."

Justin chuckled. It was hard to tell if Yosuke was joking, or seriously getting irritated by the implication. He guessed a little of both.

"Still that's no reason to take us to your place."

"His place?" Justin piped up. *Wait, did Yosuke OWN the Junes. Mark this place off as somewhere I never want to visit again.* Justin shot a quick glance Yu's way. He seemed just as puzzled.

"Oh right. I haven't told you yet, huh? I moved here from another city about six months back. This location just opened up, and my dad was assigned to manage it. So our entire family came out here."

Jesus, all my friends are entrepreneurs. Justin paused for a moment. *Did I just call them friends? I've known them for a day...*

Yosuke had reached for one of several drinks he had brought over to the table. *I guess he was too cheap to even grab SOMETHING to eat.* Justin half wanted to slide Chie's DVD over to here, and tell Yosuke to get off his ass and buy some fucking food with the \$20 he saved. Regardless, everyone reached in and grabbed a drink. Justin took a sip. *Watermelon soda? Don't they have Coca Cola or something around here?*

"Satonaka, yours is on me too."

"Yeah, I know."

You go girl.

A few moments passed by in complete silence. No one had said anything awkward, but I guess there was just nothing to talk about at the moment.

“...Hey listen guys.” Justin choked up. This wasn’t a topic he was looking forward to bringing up. “Sorry for being a complete ass the other day.”

“What do you mean?” Chie added. She seemed legitimately perplexed.

“You know. With the whole parents thing.”

“Oh. OH.” Chie turned hot red with embarrassment. Clearly it wasn’t something she wanted to talk about either. “Really, it’s okay. It was my fault too.”

“Yeah, you reacted the way I think anyone would have.” Yu added. *A sentence with more than five words? Who are you and what have you done with Yu.*

“D-Did I miss something.” Yosuke asked. That’s right; he hadn’t been there when this all went down.

“Nothing you need to worry about. Anyway, consider this my way of saying sorry.” Justin reached down into his bag and handed Chie the DVD case. At first she wasn’t sure what she was looking at, but once it clicked, her face lit up like a Christmas tree.

“Is this...?”

“Yeah, I saw it in the shopping district on the way home. Figured, why the hell not.”

“You didn’t have to do this you know. Yosuke’s the one who broke it.”

“Well now I guess he has money for grilled steaks next time.” Justin added. He made sure to come across as joking, but he was dead serious inside. *Fucking cheapskate.*

“Hey, I got everyone soda,” Yosuke added. He truly thought it was a joke. Justin wasn’t sure whether that was blessing or a curse.

“Yeah but I feel bad. I mean, it was my fault in the first place. And don’t you have other things you’d rather spend your money on.” Chie’s eyes were looking down now, almost as though she was ashamed. *What does she have to be ashamed of*, he thought, almost irritably.

“I don’t care too much for money, money can’t buy me love.”

“Wh-what?” Chie’s face turned bright red with embarrassment. It took a moment for Justin to realize quite why.

“Wait, no, not like that. Jesus. It’s a reference to a Beatles song. Haven’t you ever heard it before?”

Chie’s face only turned redder once she realized she had gotten embarrassed over nothing.

"O-Oh.... Uh... No, I haven't."

"Seriously?" Justin himself wasn't a big Beatles fan, but even he thought this was strange. "Well then I guess I know what I'm buying you next time."

"No!" Chie shouted quickly, before looking back down. *Did I do something wrong, Justin thought to himself. I probably ended up making things worse with that money remark.*

"...I mean, you've done enough already. You don't need to buy us gifts, you know."

"You're right. I don't have to. But I did it anyway."

It was true. He didn't have to pay Yosuke's tab. In fact, he had zero reason to. He pretty much hated Yosuke's guts.

"...Well thanks." Although Chie had been thoroughly embarrassed by this point, she still seemed excited about the gift Justin had given her. She put it in her book bag, before resurfacing to the table. Her face was still red with embarrassment. If he was being honest with himself, Justin thought it was actually kind of adorable. Cuter still was her trying to burrow her face into the neck of her jumper, covering her blushed face. As if she was fooling anyone.

"Y-You know," Chie hurriedly blurted out, trying to change the subject, "It's only been half a year since this place opened up, but I haven't been to the local shopping district much since."

"I can see why. You guys saw the supermarket downstairs, right?"

"A lot of stores started closing, and... Oh, uh..."

Chie blushed again. It seemed she just could not catch a break today.

"You can't blame it all on Junes, can you?"

Yosuke let out a bit of a sigh. Seemed like a sore topic for him, and why wouldn't it be. If someone accused you of putting several people out of a job, you'd get awfully irritable too. Yosuke turned his head. At first it seemed like he was trying to avoid the topic, but Justin soon realized that he had been looking at someone across the food court. *A friend of his, maybe?*

"Hey... It's Saki-senpai! Sorry, be right back."

Yosuke practically pushed the chair out from beneath him. He hadn't even run this fast when Chie had bloody-murder in her eyes.

"Yosuke's girlfriend?" Justin asked. It sure seemed that way.

"Oh, that's Saki Konishi. Her family runs a liquor store in the shopping district."

Oh, so he's not a pothead, he's just an alcoholic. Great...

"...I think she's working here part-time, though."

"Well I can't imagine it would be entirely legal for her to be working at her parents' store." Yu nodded in agreement with Justin, but otherwise remained silent.

"Yeah, you're probably right." Chie seemed a bit disappointed that she had overlooked the nature of their family business.

"Hey... are those the kids that transferred in."

Justin and Yu simultaneously turned their heads to the sound of Saki and Yosuke in the distance.

"What is it about transfer students that everyone seems to be getting so worked up over." Justin wondered out loud. He realized that pretty much applied to Chie too, but thankfully it seemed to go right over her head.

"Seriously..." A man of many words, ladies and gentlemen.

It was at that moment that Saki had gotten out of her seat and approached the rest of the group, Yosuke following close behind. Justin couldn't comprehend what it was about new kids that everyone couldn't just leave them be.

"You guys are the transfer students, right? Oh, did you hear about me already?"

No. Of course not. Like seriously, who the hell asks people that? It's not like she was famous or anything. Unless she was, you know, famous for being famous.

"It must be nice having someone else from the big city to talk to, huh?"

Is she talking about Yosuke or Yu? I don't know, I wish she would just stop gapping already. It's frickin' weird.

"I don't see Hana-chan hanging out with the other guys much."

Justin practically choked on his drink. *Is it tradition around here for people to disclose other people's personal lives or something? Hot damn.*

"N-Not necessarily..."

"He doesn't have too many friends, so I hope you two get along."

Well I could tell that muc- Wait why are we even talking about this? She didn't seriously drag herself over just to say Yosuke has no friends, right?

"Hana-chan's a good guy, but he can get nosy sometimes. You gotta tell him right to his face when he starts to annoy you."

"That so?" A devious smile crept across Justin's face. "Hey Yosuke, you're a fat sack of shit. Go fuck yourself."

"Yeah, yeah, very funny..."

It was always nice that Yosuke seemed to think Justin was joking when he had been dead serious. It's like saying to the Pope that Jesus was a rapist, and then the Pope laughing. Actually, looking around the room, it seems no one had thought Justin was being serious. *Oh this is going to be fun.*

"C-C'mon, Senpai. There's no need to worry about something like that."

"Well, my break's just about over. Back to work I go. Later!"

Saki turned around and marched out the food court to where ever it was she worked at Junes. Yosuke called out to her, trying to get her attention before she left, but to no avail. Though Justin didn't think it was so much that she didn't hear him as it was she didn't WANT to hear him. Yosuke sighed and took his seat at the end of the table.

"Hahah, Saki-Senpai says I'm annoying, but she's even nosier than me."

"Whatever you say, you sack of rodent feces." Justin smirked. He could get away with it apparently, so he'd be damned if he didn't take every opportunity he could to make Yosuke feel like a sack of shit.

"I doubt that, you pile of horseshit." Yu added in. *Didn't think he'd have the balls to join in.*

"Yeah, I mean you're the nosiest of them all, you rotting whale's carcass."

"Nice one, Chie." Justin remarked. It WAS a good one. I mean, she pretty much called him a fatass and ugly in three words.

"Alright, alright, I get it!" Yosuke shouted over the wave of insults piling on him. His brow scrunched up, lowering into a scowl. "But in all seriousness, she has a younger brother, and she pretty much treats me the same way..."

"Ohhh, you don't want her treating you like a brother, huh? Oh I get it... So that's how it is..."

"Shit just got Shakespearean up in this bitch. Saki, Saki, where art thou Saki." Justin added in.

"The daughter of a local family-run liquor store and the scion of the invading chain... The flame of forbidden love!"

Justin smiled a bit, not at the conversation, but at how even though they'd known each other for only a day Chie and him already had a pretty good back-and-forth going on.

"Wha--!? Dude, it's not like that.

"Well not anymore it's not. Kid, you got friend-zoned so hard, that the people within your immediate radius got friend-zoned. And Yu and I don't even KNOW her."

Yu couldn't help but chuckle, much to Yosuke's surprise. *Y tu, Yu?*

"Oh reaaaaally... Well I know just the thing to cheer up that lovesick heart of yours. You ever hear of the Midnight Channel?"

Midnight Channel? Sounded kind of like some weather station.

"You're supposed to look into a TV that's switched off, alone, exactly at midnight on a rainy night."

Then you say Bloody Mary's name three times, right?

"And while you're staring at your own image, another person will appear on the screen. And they say that person is your soul mate."

As much as he tried, Justin was able to stop himself from laughing hysterically. This had to be the biggest load of bullshit he had ever heard. Looking around the table, it seemed as though everyone else thought so too.

"What? For a second, I thought you were actually going to say something useful. How can you get all excited over such a childish urban legend like that?" It pained Justin to think that he was agreeing with Yosuke on something.

"Childish, huh? You don't believe it, do you!?"

"Of course I don't."

"Chie," Justin was just snapping out of his laughing fit to the real world, "I want you to listen to what you just said. If you look into a turned off television, at midnight, ONLY when it's raining, you can see your soul mate. Tell me how that makes any sense at all. I mean, wouldn't everyone notice if there TV's just sorta flipped on in the middle of the night?"

"Well, it's raining tonight! Let's all try it out- Then you'll see!"

"Try it out...? Wait, you haven't even tried it yourself!?"

"Wasn't it raining last night?" Yu added in.

"Yep. I didn't see anything on my television, how 'bout you, Yu." Justin smirked. This was comedy gold, intentional or not.

"Nothing."

"I'm trying to remember the last time I heard something this stupid..."

Chie's face was red, but for once it was red with rage. It was like her blood was boiling under her skin. *I should probably stop before I get kicked in the balls too.*

"All that aside... you know that "incident" yesterday? You guys think it was murder?"

"I don't really know much about it, but there's no way a body got up there by accident." Given the look Chie was giving him, Justin was more than happy to jump aboard the new topic.

"Ooh, what if the culprit behind it was still lurking around...?"

Chie's face seemed to lighten up a bit. At least she didn't look like she was going to pounce across the table and rip someone's throat out anymore.

"Sheesh, you shouldn't joke about stuff like that. Now who's the childish one...?"

"Clearly he'd still be lurking around if they don't even know who it is yet, anyway." Justin added, which probably didn't help everyone get off the topic.

"Look, all I'm saying is, you guys better try it out tonight."

"We're still talking about this?" Justin wondered aloud? It seemed that Yu was just as confused, whereas Yosuke was just irritated by this point.

"Alright, fine, geeze."

The hours passed over small talk before everyone started to get up and leave. *I should probably get going too*, Justin thought to himself. Yu and Yosuke had just dismissed themselves a moment or so earlier, leaving Chie and Justin behind. Justin pushed himself out of his seat and was getting ready to leave when Chie gave him a bit of a puzzled look.

"What, is there something in my teeth?"

"Huh? You heading home?"

"Was planning on jumping into bed and giving myself lung cancer, why?"

Chie gave him a very quick glare. It wasn't vicious or anything like that, but it was clear she was still a little iffy on the whole smoking subject.

"Well I was going to hang around Junes a little longer, I thought you might like to join me."

Well that's certainly strange. Why does she need me around to do some shopping? It's not like I'll end up doing anything but bitch and moan anyway.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I mean we are friends after all."

Friends huh...

"...Lead the way."

Chie's face lit up with excitement. Justin couldn't comprehend what she was so pepped up over. *It's just a bit of shopping, right? ...Right?*

The two wandered around the mall for an hour or so, making small talk.

"So tell me, what was it like in California."

There it is! I knew she was going to ask me that!

"It's..." Justin paused for a moment. He had a lot of words to describe California; like a filthy cesspool of vermin feeding on the weak, or a shithole full of Ritalin rats sniffing liquefied glue to try to get away from their miserable excuses of lives. Of course, none of this is stuff he would dare say out loud unless he wanted to get slapped upside the head.

"...It's not all its hyped up to be."

"Really?" Chie seemed shocked, but interested all the same. It was hard to tell if she knew that he was choosing his words carefully.

"Yeah, that stuff you hear about on television and the news? It's all a lie."

Chie looked slightly disappointed. *Why the hell do people care about California so much? It's just like anywhere else, except everyone is a drug addict.*

Justin stopped, as something caught his eye. It took a good few steps before Chie realized that he had stopped following her. By the time she turned around, Justin had been staring intensely through the glass window of a small music store. Chie walked back over, curious as to what had caught his attention. Looking inside of the glass case, she saw a guitar. It had a black coating over its body and a white pick board to its side. The strings shimmered against the silver inlets along the neck of

the guitar. The top of the guitar read Gibson in big gold letters. Chie wasn't exactly an expert on instruments, but she could tell that it was a beauty of a guitar.

"You play guitar?" Chie spoke up, breaking the moment of silence.

"A little bit."

Chie took a glance at the guitar, and then back at Justin, before boldly grabbing him by the wrist, pulling him towards the entrance of the store.

"Well come on then! Starring at it won't change anything."

Justin at this point was completely baffled, trying to firmly plant his feet in the ground to avoid being pulled into the store. *I've heard of being dragged to the mall, but this brings a whole new meaning to the word.* It took a bit of force on Chie's behalf, but she finally managed to drag Justin to the front counter of the store.

"Excuse me sir. How much is that guitar you have on display?"

"What are you doing!?" Justin whispered to Chie, slightly aggravated.

"Hmm? The Gibson? 155000¥."

"Oh..."

The smile on Chie's face vanished nearly immediately, the light in her eyes faded into darkness as though it had never been there to begin with. *I don't know what she was expecting to do anyway. There was no way in hell I was gonna let her buy this.*

"Alright, thanks."

She sounded almost heartbroken. *Good job me; this is why you don't do window shopping.* The two were about to leave the store, when Chie decided she wanted to take a closer look at the guitar anyway. The shape of the guitar was absolutely beautiful; the curvature seemed perfect in every way. She could practically see her face in the guitar's body, too. Little details like this just ended up making both of them feel like shit, Chie because she would never be able to afford that, and Justin for making her feel like she had to be able to afford it in the first place.

Then Chie's face brightened up, as though she had an idea. Well it was an idea alright, just not a very good one.

"Hey, do you think you could play a song?"

"Huh? Right here?"

"Yeah, you said you played before, right?"

It's true. He did say that. But he never once had done it in public, and somehow, He didn't think the store manager would approve of him plucking at the strings of a guitar he obviously couldn't afford.

"I don't think that's such a good idea."

"C'mon, you've got nothing to worry about."

The way she was staring at him, oh god the way she was staring. The sparkles in her eyes felt like they were piercing his very soul right now. *Fucking puppy dog eyes; work every time.*

"...Alright fine, but quickly."

Chie jumped up in excitement. She's getting her hopes up way too high. He picked up the guitar from the stand it had been resting on at the front of the store and rested it on his lap. He plucked each string to make sure it was in tune. The way the strings vibrated felt wonderful. There was so much power behind each string, and it felt so natural against his fingertips. *What the fuck am I doing. I don't need her feeling any worse than she already does.*

Justin shuffled through the songs he knew in his head. *Geeze, I apparently know a lot of really shitty songs*, he thought, going through the list of songs he knew how to play. He even considered "Police Truck" by the Dead Kennedys for a brief moment. He practically had to slap himself after that. What the fuck was wrong him to think that would be a good idea. In the end, he settled on "Kryptonite." It was cliché as all hell, but it was the only song he could think of where he wouldn't get arrested or kicked in the balls.

He started strumming the main riff, much to Chie's pleasure. If you thought her eyes were big before, you should have seen them then. *I wonder if she knows this song.* In retrospect, he probably should have played "Money can't buy me love," but it was too late now that he started. Justin hesitantly opened his mouth to choke up the lyrics to the song. He wasn't a very good singer, or at least he thought so. He never really sang in front of anyone, so he never actually heard anyone complaining about it. *I'm sure they would if they could.*

*I took a walk around the world to ease my troubled mind
I left my body hanging somewhere in the sands of time.
But I watched the world float to the dark side of the moon.
I feel there's nothing I can do.*

Alright, so far so good. Much to Justin's surprise, Chie hadn't covered her ears screaming in bloody agony. That's always a plus.

*I watched the world float to the dark side of the moon.
After all I knew it had to be something to do with you.*

*I really don't mind what happens now and then.
As long as you'll be my friend at the end.*

Justin looked up again from the neck of his guitar for a brief second. He had noticed at this point that Chie wasn't the only one staring at him anymore. *Oh for the love of fuck. I KNEW this would happen.* Justin strummed hard on his guitar, not necessarily because it felt right, but because he had a nervous tendency of playing louder in case he made any mistakes. That way the sounds of the other strings would cover up the sound of his fault. He opened his mouth wide open, as though to belt out the chorus.

*If I go crazy then will you still call me Superman?
If I'm alive and well, will you be there holding my hand?
I'll keep you by my side with my superhuman might.
Kryptonite.*

Even though there was still a lot left to the song, Justin decided it would be a good time to stop. People were staring, and it's not like the song really got much different anyway. At this point he just wanted to hang the guitar up and leave.

"That was amazing!" Chie practically shouted with glee. She still had those puppy dog eyes on too, much to Justin's displeasure.

"It was alright." He rubbed the back of his head, slightly embarrassed.

"It was more than 'alright,' it was incredible!" Chie grinned.

Justin hurriedly got up from his seat to make a b-line for the exit, Chie trailing behind, trying to catch up with him.

"W-What's wrong." Chie asked, her glee quickly transforming to concern.

"It's nothing. I just get claustrophobic really easy." Technically it wasn't a lie, though from the looks of it Chie didn't quite believe him. It didn't matter either way. The two remained silent for the rest of the time they spent together in the mall.

11:59.

Justin starred at the television screen resting on the opposite end of his bedroom.

"Why the fuck am I doing this." He yawned. "This has got to be the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. And yet here I am, staying up till midnight trying it out."

He grunted at the thought. He probably just felt guilty about the guitar fiasco earlier today. *What the hell was Chie thinking? She couldn't have possibly thought she*

could afford that, and even if she could, there was no way I would let her buy it. Out of the question.

He sighed again. *Come on already clock. Change...*

12:00

See nothing. Now I can finally-

Just then the TV flickered on.

"...What... the... fuck?"

He crawled over to the front of the TV getting a good look at it. *Oh I get it, I'm being Punk'd right?* It made sense. It was all just some prank Chie had made up to watch him squirm... So then how is the TV working when it's unplugged?

"Ohshitohshitohshit. What the fuck."

CALM THE FUCK DOWN. Alright, deep breathes. Okay good. Alright now focus, WHAT am I looking at.

It was hard to make out. Whatever room this was being filmed in was dark as all hell. There was a dark green tint to everything. There was something in the center of the room, flailing about strangely. Was that a person? As they flailed around more, Justin could make out tell-tale shapes from the figures silhouette. Fingers, hair, arms, that stuff. But what the hell was going on.

Just then the TV flipped back off. Justin scrambled for the remote, and pressed a few buttons. Nothing. This.... This actually happened?

Oh shit what the hell is going on here.